

Knickerbocker Theater
(Empress Theater, Gayety Theater)
246-254 South High Street
Columbus
Franklin County
Ohio

HABS No. OH-2212

HABS
OHIO,
25 - COLP
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

KNICKERBOCKER THEATER
(Empress Theater, Gayety Theater)

HABS No. OH-2212

Location: 246-254 South High Street, Columbus, Franklin County, Ohio.

Present Use: The building is scheduled to be demolished in accordance with the redevelopment plan for the city. In order to insure a permanent record, a documentation of this building has been secured.

Significance: This commercial building is distinguished for its three arched bays of color-glazed terra cotta, and is a good example of the pre-manufactured architectural details available through catalogues of the time. Because the facade at the street level has been so extensively altered, the original tripartite design is not known.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1915-1916.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a list of past property owners for this building. Source of these records is Franklin County Recorders' Office.

Horace L. Chapman	Prior to 1919
Grace C. Rose	1919
Frank B. and Frances Chapman	1932
Martha S. Chapman, Horace L. Chapman, Grace C. Brown	1951
Grace C. Rose and Horace L. Chapman, Trustees	July 21, 1951
Grace C. Rose	February 6, 1964
Grace C. Rose and Horace L. Chapman, Trustees	May 26, 1970
Horace L. Chapman and Horace L. Chapman, Trustees	May 4, 1971
City of Columbus, Ohio	July 15, 1977-1980

- B. Alterations and additions: The auditorium was demolished to make way for a parking lot, circa 1960.

Trailways Bus Company, which occupied the ground floor, built a canopy in the rear for bus docking.

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- B. Historical Context: The building was designed as a theater and was in operation from 1916-1946. It was a well-known fixture in downtown Columbus.

Following the theater's closing it was used as a night club. In recent years it was used for commercial purposes. Trailways Bus Company had an office on the ground floor. A record store and a piano company also occupied the ground floor.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Three main arched bays have colorful terracotta tiles (blue, green and yellow). Stone lion heads on top of the pilasters help make for an interesting ornamental feature in the building.
2. Condition of fabric: Although it needs some repairs, the overall condition of the exterior fabric is good. In the interior parts of original fabric are in relatively good state of repair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The five-bay rectangular building is 44 feet high. (Length and width of the building are not available).
2. Foundations: Masonry.
3. Walls: The front facade walls are brick faced with colored terracotta tiles in beige, red, yellow and green. The remaining portions are all of brick with horizontal soldier courses. The rear and side facades are also of brick. The tympana and the archivolt in the front facade are multi-colored in beige, blue, red and green. The archivolt is multi-colored egg-and-dart motif and cross-tied fascia bundles, while the tympana contain cornucopias disposed symmetrically around cartouches. The three arched bays are divided by pilasters of beige tile, each culminating in a lion's head and connected horizontally by a beige tile cornice.
4. Structural system, framing: Brick bearing wall system is used to carry concrete beams which in turn carry concrete slab. Concrete columns support floors.
5. Canopy: Steel frame canopy in the rear to accommodate bus.
6. Chimneys: Five exterior flues, mounted to building wall.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Commercial storefront glass doors in the front elevation; flush doors in the side and rear elevations.

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- b. Windows: The windows in the front facade come in various types. The ground floor is lined with wide storefront windows. In the upper floors the windows within the arches are triple double-hung type and have segmental and cubical shapes. The plain, all-brick part of the front elevation has rectangular-shaped twin 2-over-2 double-hung windows.

Rectangular-shaped triple 2-over-2 double-hung windows are on the side (south) elevation only, while standard 2-over-2 double-hung windows are used on the rear elevation.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Flat roof with tar and gravel covering.
- b. Cornice: The cornice in the main elevation is of beige-colored terra cotta with a design pattern which was made from a mold.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: A basement is included in the building. First through third floors are utilized as commercial spaces.
- 2. Stairways: Functional concrete stairway in good condition.
- 3. Flooring: Linoleum or carpet on concrete flooring.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are stud partitions with plaster finish. Ceilings are modern suspended acoustic tile.
- 5. Doors: Flush core doors.
- 6. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Lighting: Ceiling-mounted fluorescent fixtures.
 - b. Elevator: One passenger elevator.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The building is located in downtown Columbus, between Rich and Main Streets. It faces west.

Prepared by: Steven M. Elbert
Karlsberger and Associates, Inc.
Columbus, Ohio
1980

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Property abstracts, Franklin County Recorders' Office.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Columbus City Directory 1916-1960

Those Wonderful Downtown Theaters, Phil Sheridan

Architecture: Columbus, Columbus Chapter of the AIA, 1976

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was the result of an agreement between the Capitol South Community Urban Redevelopment Corporation, Columbus, Ohio, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C. in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the completion of the redevelopment plan. Steven M. Elbert of Karlsberger and Associates, Inc., Columbus, Ohio, prepared the written documentation and also took the photographs. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the documentation in the winter of 1982, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. John A. Burns, AIA, was the HABS project co-ordinator.